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(54) **DIFFERENTIAL DRIVE ROBOTIC
PLATFORM AND ASSEMBLY**

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B25J 9/16 (2006.01)
B60L 1/00 (2006.01)
B62D 57/032 (2006.01)
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(57)

ABSTRACT

A robotic platform may include a chassis, left and right wheel assemblies, and a controller. The left and right wheel assemblies may include a caster wheel, a motor, a shaft, and a bevel gear. The wheel may be mounted to an axle for rotation about a drive axis and steering about a steering axis. The drive shaft may have one end coupled to the axle and another end wrapped by a respective belt to control rotation of the shaft about the steering axis. The bevel gear may couple the shaft to the axle so rotation of the shaft about the steering axis controls rotation of the wheel about the drive axis to drive the platform in a substantially horizontal direction. The controller may control the left and right drive motors independently, to provide differential drive. Various other assemblies, robots, and methods are also disclosed.

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

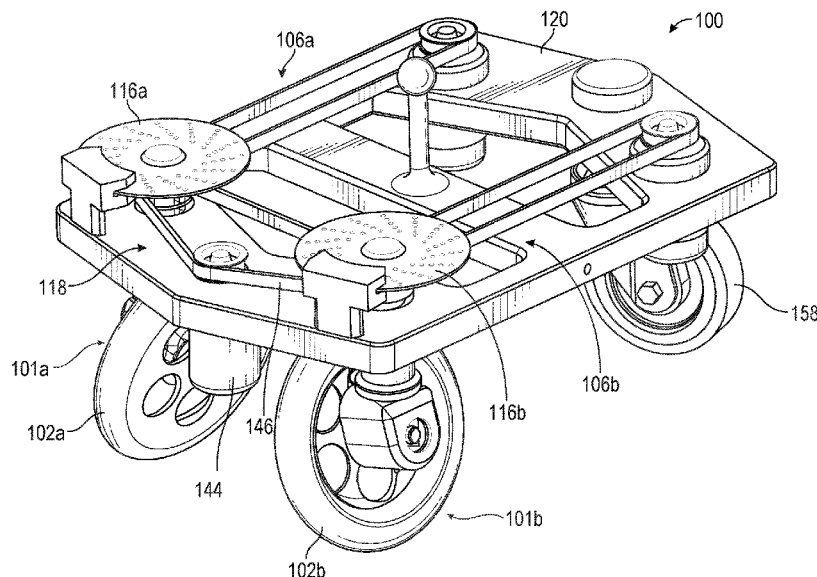
CPC **G05D 1/0088** (2013.01); **B25J 5/007**
(2013.01); **B25J 9/08** (2013.01); **B25J 9/162**
(2013.01); **B60L 1/00** (2013.01); **B62D 57/022**
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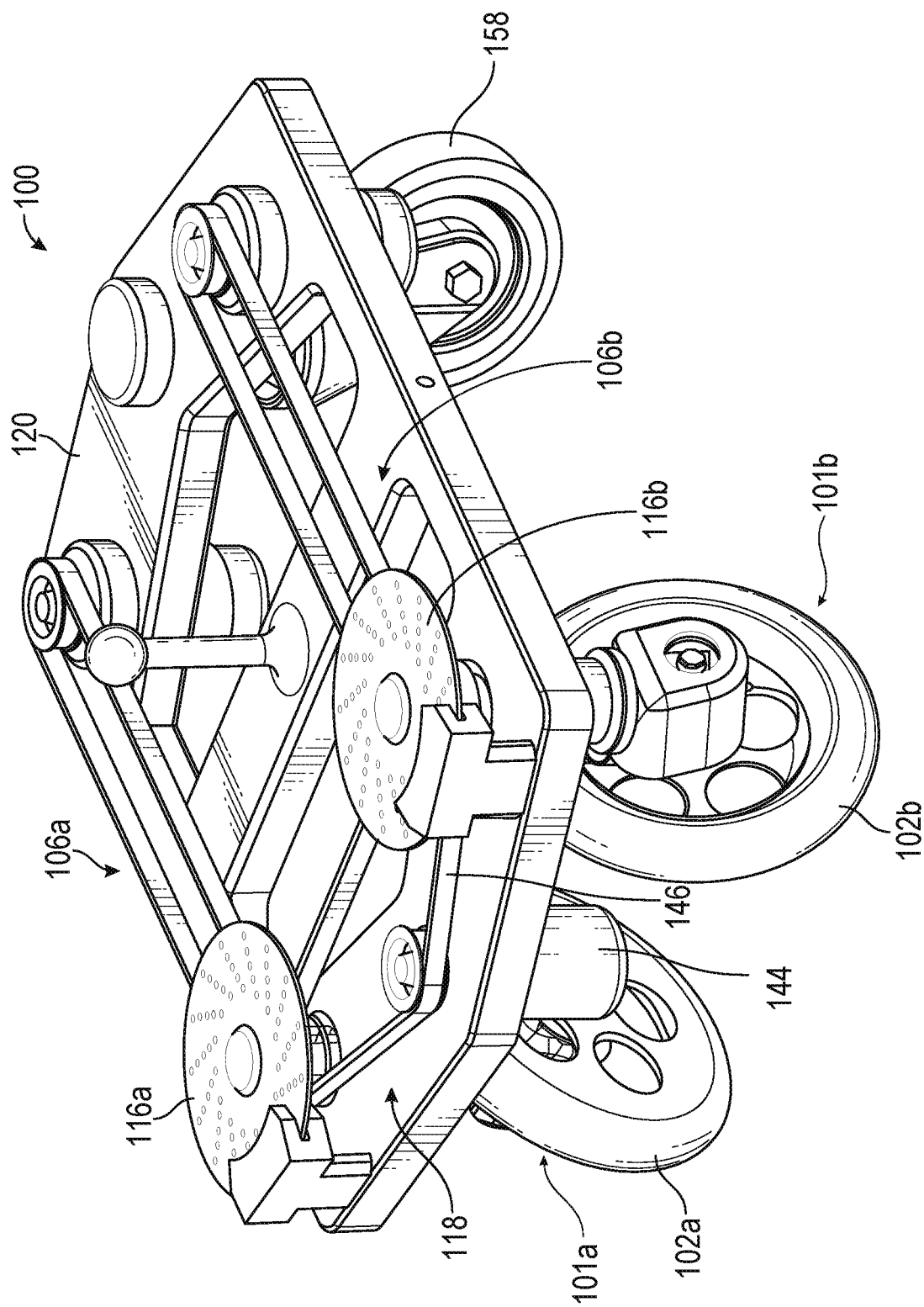


FIG. 1

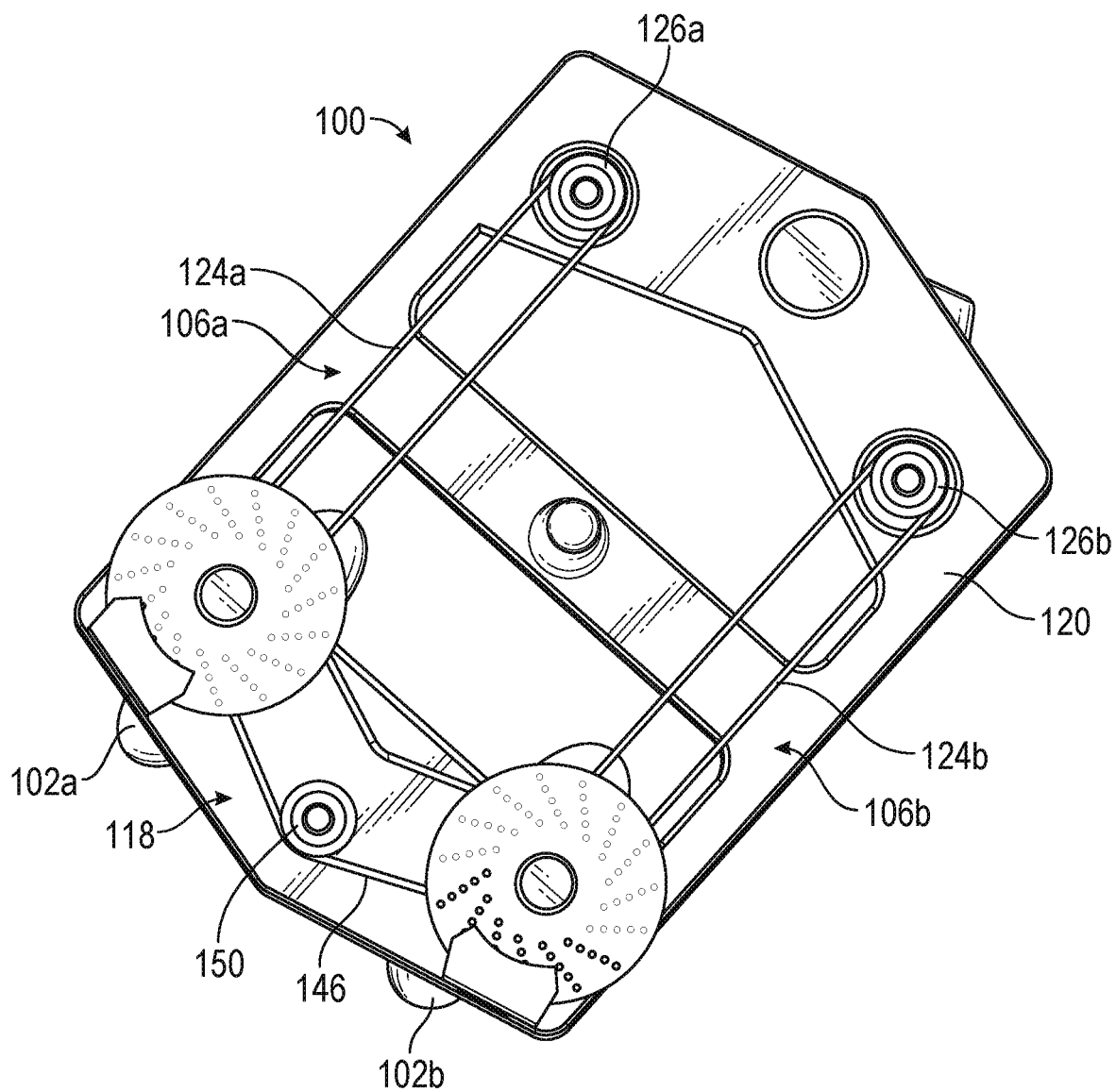
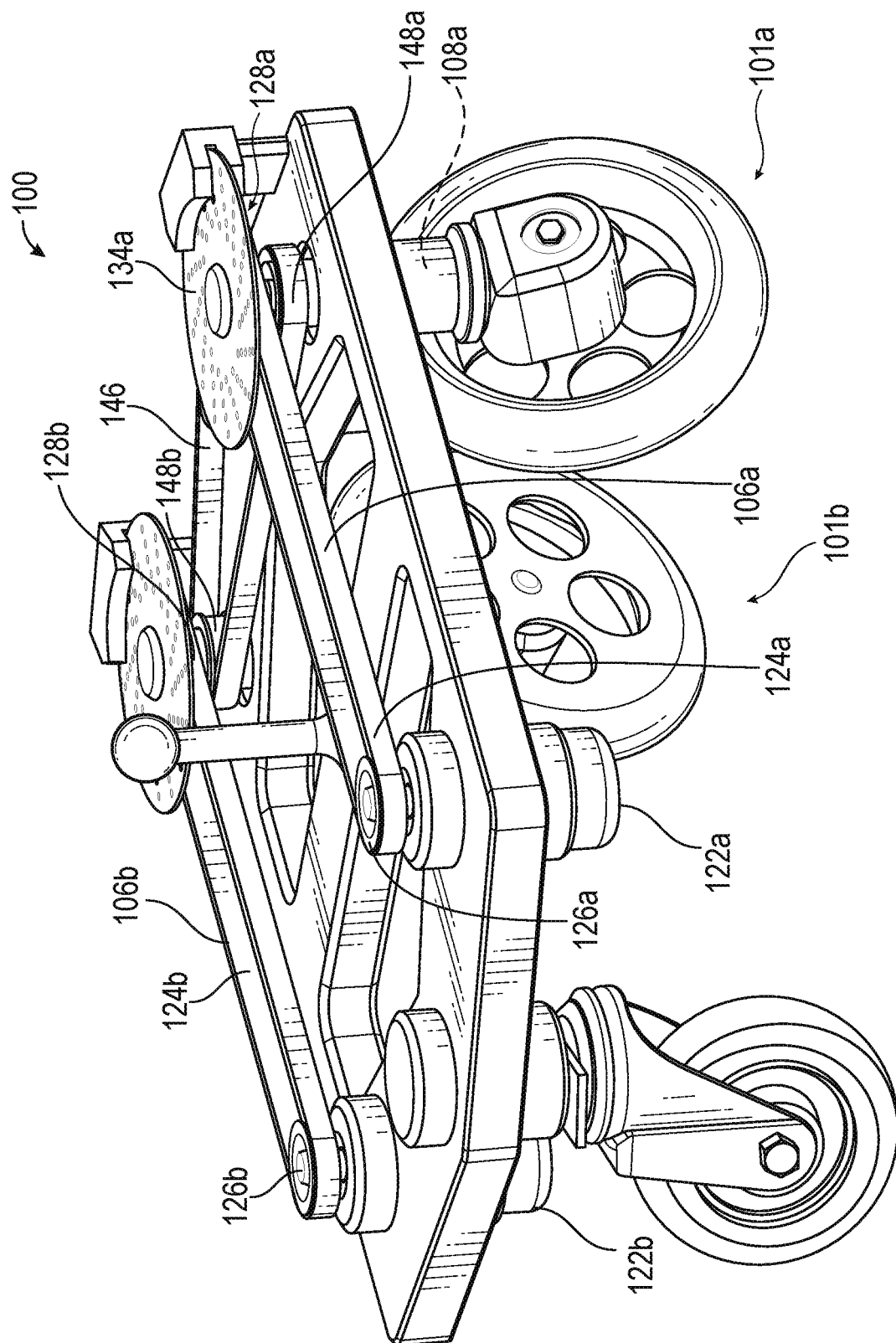


FIG. 2

3
G
E

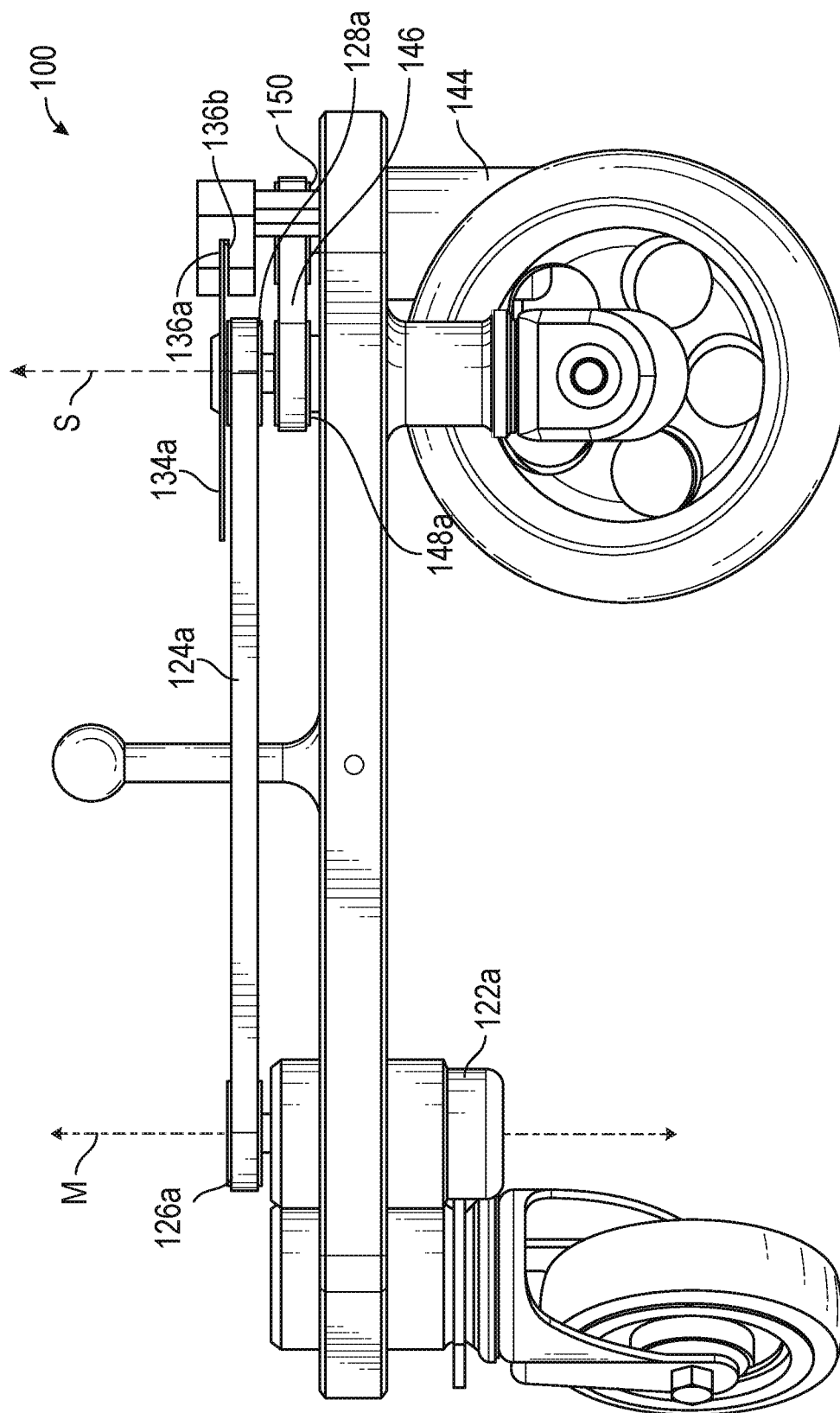


FIG. 4

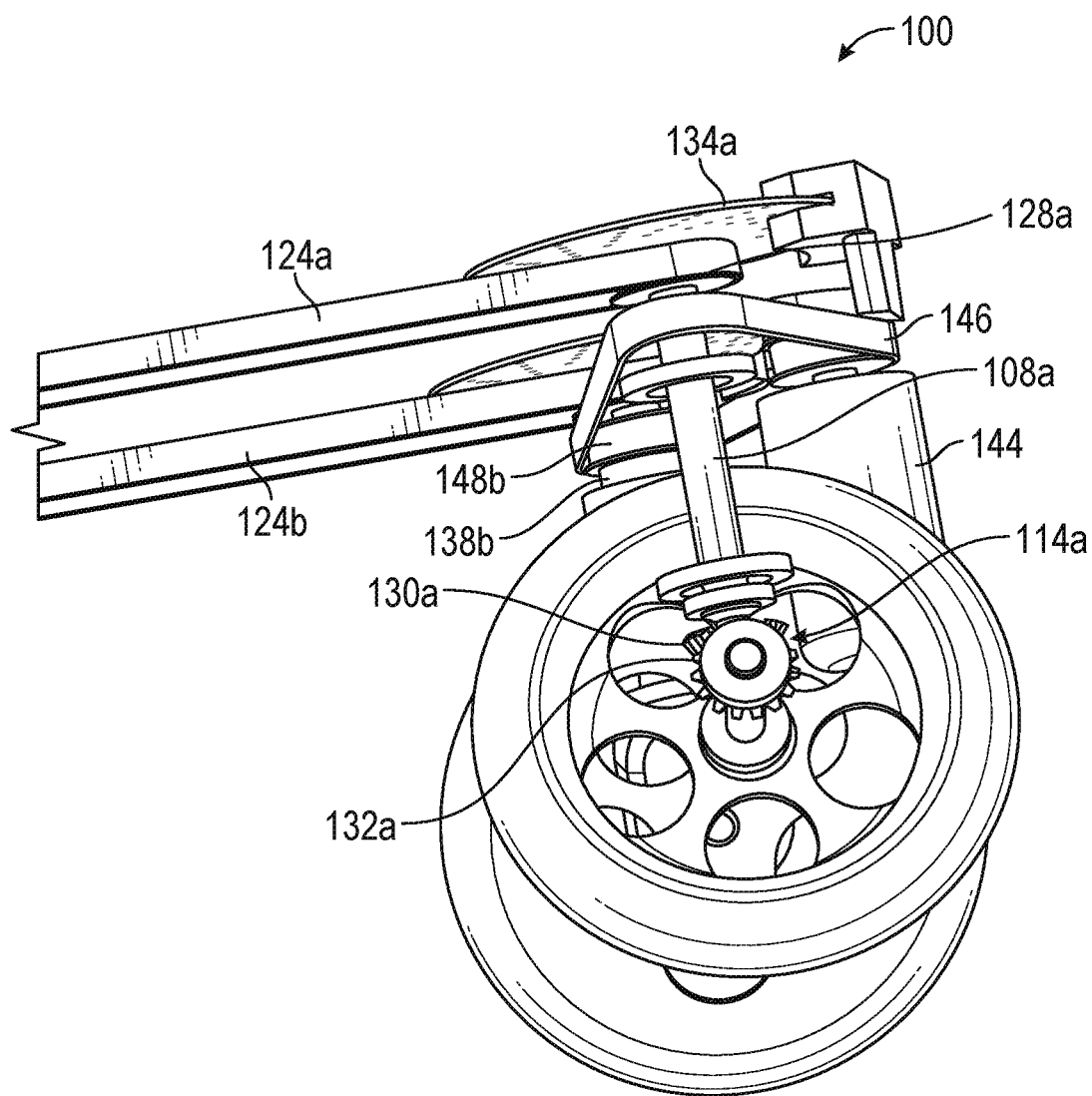


FIG. 5

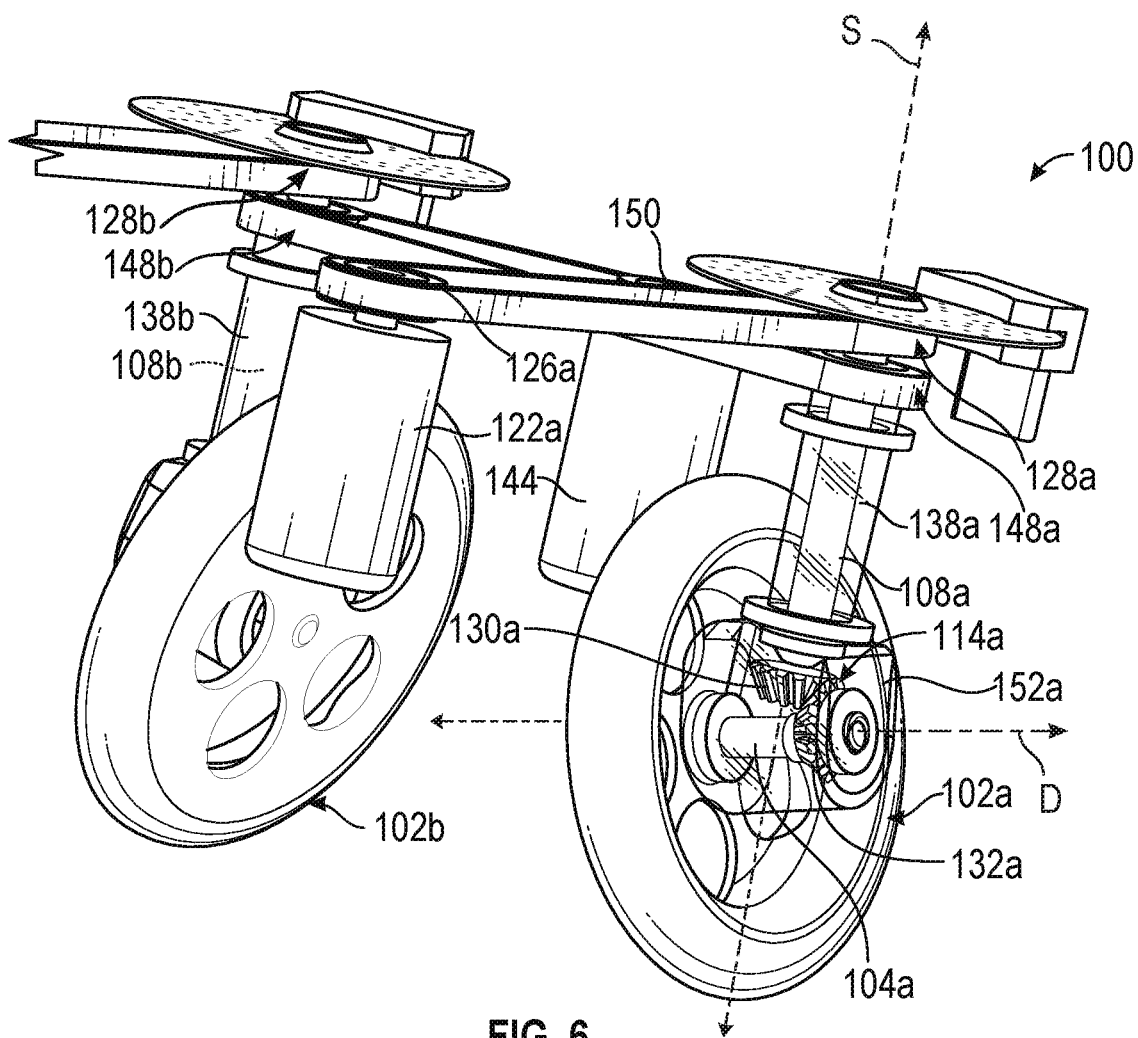
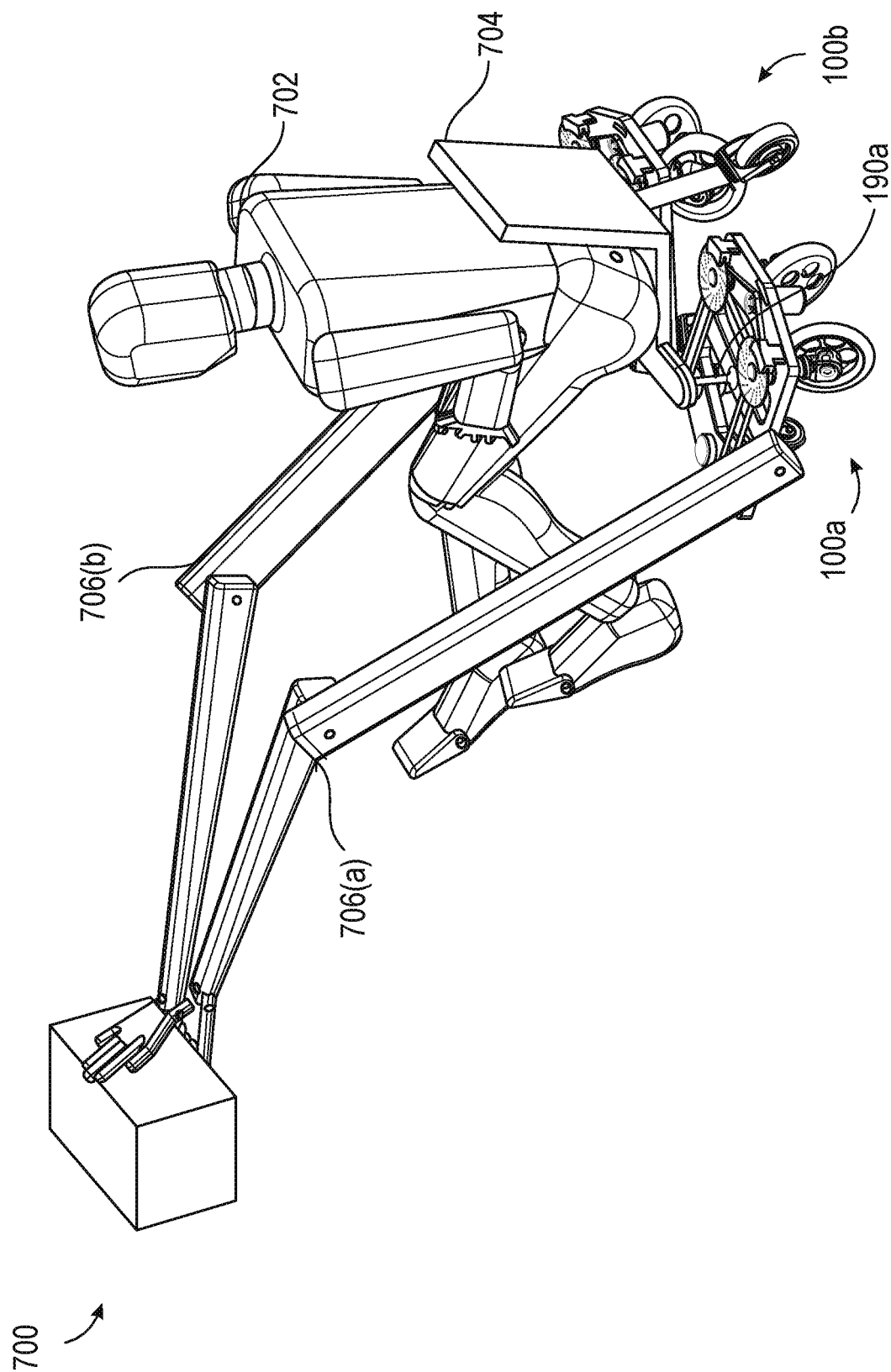


FIG. 6



Method
800

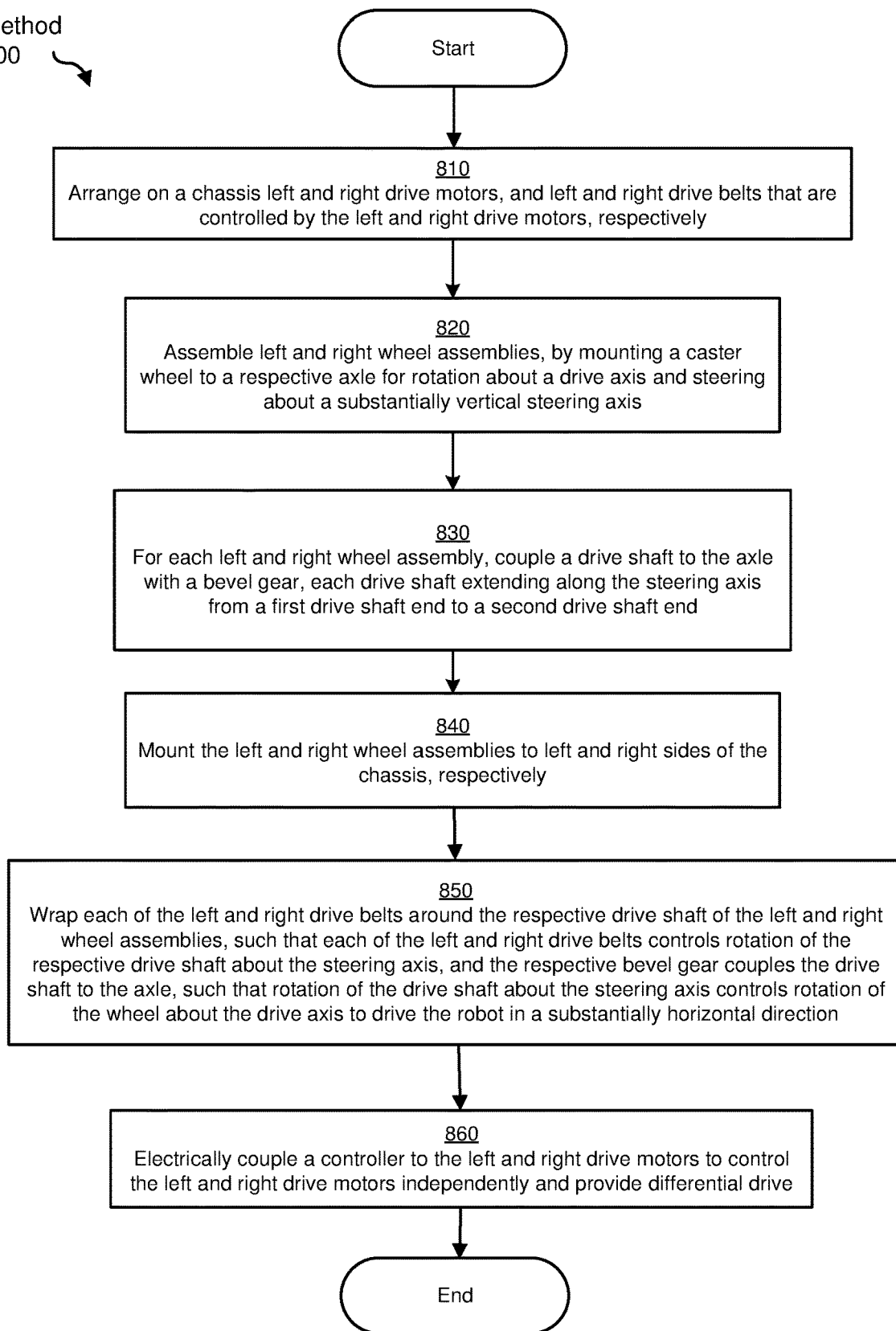


FIG. 8

1

DIFFERENTIAL DRIVE ROBOTIC PLATFORM AND ASSEMBLY

BACKGROUND

Robots have found use in a nearly unlimited number of applications, from mapping and exploring unknown terrain, to performing rescue missions in extreme environmental conditions, to performing surgeries in hospitals, and to managing data centers, among a host of other scenarios. Robots are typically mounted to a robotic platform to support the robot on a floor or other surface. Caster wheels may be mounted to the robotic platform to enable rolling or otherwise linear movement of the robot in a generally horizontal direction. Some robotic platforms may have caster wheels that are powered or driven. For example, a power assembly (such as an electric motor) may control rotation of a caster wheel's axle, which may in turn control rotation of the wheel thereabout to move the robot. Some powered or driven caster wheels may also include brake assemblies designed to retard rotation of the wheel axle and thus slow or stop rotation of the wheel, thereby slowing or stopping the robot. Traditionally, at least a portion of this power assembly (e.g., the motor), as well as the brake, is disposed within the circumference of the wheel, near the wheel hub and adjacent to the axle.

The placement of a power or brake assembly within the circumference of a caster wheel, however, can lead to various disadvantages. For example, when an electrical component of the power assembly (e.g., a motor) is disposed within the circumference of the wheel, the motor may be exposed to whatever conditions the wheel moves through. This is particularly problematic for robots that are intended to move through treacherous conditions or water.

In addition, when all or some of the power assembly is located within the circumference of the wheel, the electrical wires that provide electricity to the power assembly may limit the maneuverability of the robotic platform since the wheel may be unable to rotate 360 degrees without entangling the wires. This is especially disadvantageous for robots intended to perform highly maneuverable functions.

Positioning all or some of the power assembly within the circumference of the wheel may also lead to an increased risk of damage to the power assembly. For instance, when the driven caster wheel is part of a robot or other object that is susceptible to falling or being dropped, the power assembly may be damaged by such forceful impacts. Similar issues arise when positioning brake assemblies within the circumference of a caster wheel.

As such, the instant disclosure identifies and addresses a need for improved caster wheels and robotic platforms.

SUMMARY

As will be described in greater detail below, the instant disclosure describes a driven (or powered) robotic platform. The robotic platform may be driven by a power assembly that drives left and right driven wheel assemblies independently. The power assembly may drive each of the left and right driven wheel assemblies by controlling rotation of a respective drive shaft, which may be connected to a wheel axle via a bevel gear. Thus, the entire power assembly may be located outside the circumference of the wheel. The power assembly may include left and right drive motors that may enable differential drive to provide improved steering and maneuverability.

2

In one example, a robotic platform may include a chassis, left and right driven wheel assemblies, and a controller. The chassis may have oppositely disposed top and bottom sides, left and right sides, and a fore end and an aft end. The left and right driven wheel assemblies may be disposed proximate the aft end of the chassis. Each of the left and right driven wheel assemblies may include a caster wheel, a drive shaft, a drive motor, and a bevel gear. The caster wheels may each be mounted to an axle for rotation about a drive axis and for steering about a substantially vertical steering axis. The drive shafts may extend along the steering axis from a first drive shaft end to a second drive shaft end. The second drive shaft end may be coupled to the motor, and the bevel gear may couple the first drive shaft end to the axle such that rotation of the drive shaft about the steering axis controls rotation of the caster wheel about the drive axis to drive the robotic platform in a substantially horizontal direction. The controller may control the left and right drive motors independently of one another.

In some embodiments, the robotic platform may also include a steer assembly disposed on the chassis. The steer assembly may include a steer motor and a steer belt. Each driven wheel assembly may include a steer shaft extending along the steering axis from a first steer shaft end to a second steer shaft end. The first steer shaft end may be coupled to the wheel axle and the second shaft end may be wrapped by the steer belt such that the steer belt controls rotation of the steer shaft about the steering axis, thereby steering the caster wheels about the steering axis. The steer belt may be wrapped around the steer shaft of each of the left and right driven wheel assemblies such that the steer shafts rotate synchronously. The drive shaft may be concentrically arranged inside of the steer shaft.

In some embodiments, the robotic platform may include, for at least one of the left and right driven wheel assemblies, a disc brake disposed on the drive shaft dimensioned to retard motion of the drive shaft and thereby retard motion of the wheel. The disc brake may include (1) a disc disposed on the drive shaft and configured to rotate with the drive shaft about the steering axis, and (2) a pair of pads on top and bottom sides of the disc. The pads may be compressible against the disc to retard rotation of the disc and thereby retard rotation of the drive shaft.

In some embodiments, the drive axis and the steering axis together form an oblique angle such that the caster wheel is tilted relative to the steering axis. The caster wheel may be configured to freely rotate 360 degrees about the steering axis. The robotic platform may also include at least one idle caster wheel disposed proximate the fore end of the chassis. The second drive shaft end and the drive belt may be disposed on top of the chassis.

A robot having a chassis, left and right driven wheel assemblies, and a controller is also disclosed. The chassis may have oppositely disposed top and bottom sides, left and right sides, and a fore end and an aft end. The left and right driven wheel assemblies may be disposed proximate the aft end of the chassis. Each of the left and right driven wheel assemblies may include a caster wheel, a drive shaft, a motor, and a bevel gear. For each left and right driven wheel assembly, the caster wheel may be mounted to an axle for rotation about a drive axis and steering about a steering axis. The drive shaft may extend along the steering axis from a first drive shaft end to a second drive shaft end. The first drive shaft end may be coupled to the wheel axle and the second drive shaft end may be coupled to the motor. The bevel gear may couple the first drive shaft end to the axle such that rotation of the drive shaft about the steering axis

3

controls rotation of the wheel about the drive axis to drive the robot in a substantially horizontal direction. The controller may be configured to control the left and right drive motors independently of one another.

A method of assembling a robotic platform is also disclosed. The method may include arranging a drive assembly on a chassis, assembling left and right driven wheel assemblies, mounting the left driven wheel assembly to a left side of the chassis, and mounting the right driven wheel assembly to the right side of the chassis.

Assembling left and right driven wheel assemblies may include mounting a caster wheel to a respective axle for rotation about a drive axis and steering about a substantially vertical steering axis and coupling a first end of a drive shaft to the axle with a bevel gear. The drive assembly may include a left drive motor and a left drive belt that is controlled by the left drive motor, and a right drive motor and a right drive belt that is controlled by the right drive motor. Each drive shaft may extend along the respective steering axis from the first drive shaft end to a second drive shaft end. The method may include wrapping the left drive belt around the drive shaft of the left caster wheel assembly, and wrapping the right drive belt around the drive shaft of the right caster wheel assembly. The method may also include electrically coupling a controller to the left and right drive motors to control the left and right drive motors independently from one another. Each bevel gear may couple the respective drive shaft to the axle such that rotation of the drive shaft about the steering axis controls rotation of the wheel about the drive axis to drive the robot in a substantially horizontal direction.

Features from any of the above-mentioned embodiments may be used in combination with one another in accordance with the general principles described herein. These and other embodiments, features, and advantages will be more fully understood upon reading the following detailed description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings and claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings illustrate a number of exemplary embodiments and are a part of the specification. Together with the following description, these drawings demonstrate and explain various principles of the instant disclosure.

FIG. 1 is a rear, left perspective view of a differential drive robotic platform, according to an embodiment.

FIG. 2 is a top view of the robotic platform of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is front, right perspective view of the robotic platform of FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 is a right side view of the robotic platform of FIG. 1.

FIG. 5 is a view of the robotic platform of FIG. 1 with the chassis removed.

FIG. 6 is a right side view of the robotic platform of FIG. 1, with the chassis and a casting removed.

FIG. 7 is a perspective view of two of the robotic platforms from FIG. 1 being used to support an accessibility robot.

FIG. 8 is a flow diagram of a method of assembling a differential drive robotic platform, according to an embodiment.

Throughout the drawings, identical reference characters and descriptions indicate similar, but not necessarily identical, elements. While the exemplary embodiments described herein are susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments have been shown

4

by way of example in the drawings and will be described in detail herein. However, the exemplary embodiments described herein are not intended to be limited to the particular forms disclosed. Rather, the instant disclosure covers all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the scope of the appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS

The present disclosure is generally directed to robotic platforms that are driven by caster wheel assemblies in a manner that may provide differential drive and/or a variety of other features and advantages. As will be explained in greater detail below, embodiments of the instant disclosure may include a robotic platform having left and right driven (or powered) caster wheels mounted on an aft end of a chassis. The caster wheels may each be driven by a respective left or right power assembly via a drive shaft and bevel gear arrangement. The left and right power assemblies may each drive rotation of the respective driven wheel about an axle to move the wheel in a substantially horizontal direction, while the wheel may be steerable about a drive shaft that extends along a substantially vertical steering axis. The respective power assembly may be connected to one end of the drive shaft to control its rotation about the steering axis. The other end of the drive shaft may be connected to the wheel axle via a bevel gear. The left and right power assemblies may each include a drive motor coupled to the drive shaft. The drive motors may thus control the drive shafts independently of one another. The drive shafts may each extend from the respective axle to a location above the chassis.

The devices and assemblies described herein may provide a number of features and advantages over traditional systems. For example, in some configurations, the entire power assemblies of driven caster wheels may be located distally from the wheels. As such, components of the power assemblies may be protected, for example, from environmental conditions that may surround the wheels. This may be particularly advantageous for robotic platforms intended to move through extreme weather conditions or through water. Also, a power assembly that is distally located from the wheel may be better protected from damaging forceful impacts that may occur, for instance, in configurations where the driven caster wheels are mounted to a robot that is susceptible to falling or being dropped. Another advantage of the driven caster wheel disclosed herein may be that configuration of the driven caster wheel may allow a caster wheel to freely rotate 360 degrees about its steering axis without becoming entangled by electrical wires or other components of the drive assembly. This driven caster wheel may also have a brake assembly that is disposed distally from the caster wheel (e.g., entirely above the chassis), which may similarly protect the brake assembly from impact and environmental damage. Furthermore, the left and right drive assemblies may be controlled independently of one another to enable differential drive, which may provide improved steering and maneuverability.

The following will provide, with reference to FIGS. 1-6, detailed descriptions of a robotic platform. FIG. 1 is a rear, left perspective view of a robotic platform 100, according to an embodiment. The robotic platform 100 may include a chassis 120, a right drive assembly 106a arranged on a right side of the chassis 120, a left drive assembly 106b arranged on a left side of the chassis 120, left and right wheel assemblies 101a, 101b disposed on the left and right sides of

the chassis **120**, and an idle caster wheel **158** disposed on the fore end of the chassis **120**. While a single idle caster wheel **158** is shown coupled to robotic platform **100**, an additional fixed or rotatable idle caster wheel (or multiple idle caster wheels) may be coupled to robotic platform **100**. Furthermore, while the idle caster wheel **158** is shown to be rotatable around a vertical axis, the idle caster wheel **158** may also be configured to be fixed such that it does not rotate around a vertical axis.

The chassis **120** may have oppositely disposed top and bottom sides, a fore end and an aft end. The terms “fore” and “aft,” in some embodiments, generally refer to relative positions on a robotic platform and are not necessarily indicative of a primary direction of movement of the robotic platform or of a configuration of a robot mounted on the robotic platform (e.g. the front of the robot on the platform may be positioned facing the fore end, the aft end, the right or left sides, etc.). Furthermore, the chassis **120** may have a variety of shapes, sizes, thicknesses, etc. in different embodiments of the instant disclosure.

The drive assemblies **106a**, **106b** may each include drive motors **122a**, **122b** (as referenced in FIG. 3) and drive belts **124a**, **124b** (as references in FIGS. 2 and 3) that are controlled by drive motors **122a**, **122b**. In some embodiments, the drive motors **122a**, **122b** generally represent any type or form of machine powered in any suitable manner (e.g., by electricity, internal combustion, etc.) to supply motive power for the robotic platform **100**. Also, the drive belt **124a**, **124b** generally represent any type or form of transmission mechanism (e.g., belts, chains, driveshafts, etc.) for transferring power from a motor to a wheel assembly. Furthermore, while FIGS. 1-6 show the motors **122a**, **122b** as being positioned remotely from wheel assemblies **101a**, **101b**, the motors **122a**, **122b** may also be coupled directly above the wheel assemblies **101a**, **101b** such that rotating shafts of the motors **122a**, **122b** are coupled directly to wheel assemblies **101a**, **101b**.

While FIGS. 1-6 show and describe a robotic platform with two driven caster wheel assemblies, any suitable number of driven caster wheel assemblies may be provided while remaining within the scope of this disclosure. Furthermore, while the following description at times refers to only one of the wheel assemblies (e.g., the left wheel assembly **101a**), it should be well understood that the description of the one-wheel assembly (e.g., the left wheel assembly **101a**) may also apply to some or all of the other wheel assemblies (e.g., the right wheel assembly **101b**). A more detailed description and discussion of the driven wheel assemblies described herein may be found in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/828,349, titled “DRIVEN CASTER WHEEL AND ASSEMBLY,” filed on 30 Nov. 2017, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

With reference to FIG. 6, wheel assembly **101a** may include a wheel **102a** mounted to an axle **104a**, a drive shaft **108a**, and a bevel gear **114a**. The wheel **102a** may be mounted to its respective axle **104a** for rotation about a drive axis D. In this example, the rotation of the wheel **102a** about the drive axis may be controlled by a drive assembly **106a**, as shown in FIG. 1, that is located distally from the wheel **102a** and on the chassis **120**. The drive shaft **108a** may extend substantially vertically (e.g., vertically or almost vertically) from the drive assembly **106a** to the axle **104a** and rotate about a substantially vertical steering axis S. The bevel gear **114a** may connect the drive shaft **108a** to the axle **104a** to translate torque and power from the drive assembly **106a** to the wheel **102a**.

As shown in FIG. 4, the entire drive assembly **106a** may be located distally from the wheel **102a**. In this configuration, pulleys **126a**, **128a** and the drive belt **124a** may be disposed on top of and chassis **120**, which may protect the robotic platform from damage. For example, by positioning the power assembly’s electrical components distally from the caster wheel, the robotic platform **100** may be able to drive through deep water or survive other environmental conditions.

With reference to FIG. 3, the drive assemblies **106a**, **106b** may each include drive motors **122a**, **122b** and drive belts **124a**, **124b** that rotate about the motor pulleys **126a**, **126b** and the drive shaft pulleys **128a**, **128b**. The power of the wheel assemblies **101a**, **101b** may be controlled by the respective drive shaft pulleys **128a**, **128b** that are mounted to or integral within the drive shafts **108a**, **108b**. As shown in FIG. 4, in some embodiments, the drive motor **122a** may rotate about a substantially vertical drive motor axis M that extends substantially parallel (e.g., parallel or approximately parallel) to the steering axis S. Drive motor pulley **126a** may be mounted to the upper portion of the drive motor **122a**, and the respective drive shaft pulley **128a** may be mounted to an upper portion of respective drive shaft **108a**. The drive belt **124a** may extend between the pulleys **126a**, **128a** and within a plane substantially perpendicular to the drive motor axis M and/or the steering axis S. Thus, the drive motor **122a** may cause the drive motor pulley **126a** to move about the drive motor axis M, which may in turn cause the drive belt **124a** to move about the drive pulleys **126a**, **128a**, thereby causing the pulley **128a** and the drive shaft **108a** to rotate about the steering axis S. The drive motors **122a**, **122b** may be controlled independently of one another by a controller (e.g., an electrical system programmed with logic, with encoders, and/or with other electronic elements to control robotic platform **100**) to provide differential power. The terms “differential power” and/or “differential drive,” as used herein, generally refers to supplying independent power and/or control to at least two different wheels of a robotic assembly.

Referring to FIGS. 4-6, the torque and power from the drive motor **122a** may be transferred from the drive shaft **108a** to the respective axle **104a** via the bevel gear **114a**. The drive shaft **108a** and axle **104a** may function as the shafts of the bevel gear **114a**. Mating gears **130a**, **132a** may be disposed on the lower portion of the drive shaft **108a** and axle **104a**. Thus, the bevel gear **114a** may transfer and change the direction of the power and torque from the drive assembly **106a** to the wheel **102a**. As shown in FIG. 5, the bevel gear **114a** is a miter gear, and the mating gears **130a**, **132a** provide a gear ratio of 1:1. The bevel gear **114a**, however, can have other suitable configurations and gear ratios while remaining within the scope of this disclosure. For example, the mating gears **130a**, **132a** may include any suitable number of teeth. Also, the intersection of the drive and steering axes can form any suitable angle while remaining within the scope of this disclosure.

As described herein, drive power may be provided to the wheel **102a** by way of the substantially vertical drive shaft **108a** that extends along only one side of the wheel **102a** from the axle **104a** to a location entirely above the wheel (e.g., above chassis **120**). As such, the wheel **102a** may be able to freely rotate 360 degrees about the steering axis S. This configuration may offer many advantages from a steering and maneuverability standpoint. In addition, the configuration of the drive shaft **108a** and the bevel gear **114a** may result in a robotic platform **100** that may be free of wires or other electrical components extending close to the

wheels **102a**, **102b**. For example, since the drive shaft **108a** may receive power at its upper end and transfer power to the wheel **102a** at its lower end via the bevel gear **114a**, the drive belt **124a** may be located entirely above the wheel, and the electrical components may be disposed distally from the wheel **102a**, leaving a simple gearing configuration proximate the wheel **102a**.

In some embodiments, brakes **116a**, **116b** may be disposed entirely above the respective wheels **102a**, **102b**. The brakes **116a**, **116b** may each be disposed on the respective upper drive shaft ends and configured to retard motion of the respective drive shafts **108a**, **108b** about the steering axis, thereby retarding motion of the respective wheels **102a**, **102b** about the drive axis. Any suitable brake configuration may be used. In one example, the brake **116a** may represent a disc brake, including a disc **134a** arranged on the upper drive shaft end and configured to rotate about the steering axis along with the drive shaft **108a**. As shown in FIGS. 2-5, the disc **134a** may be mounted to the upper drive shaft end by being mounted to the drive shaft pulley **128a**. The disc **134a** may have top and bottom surfaces, with each extending in a horizontal plane that is substantially perpendicular to the steering axis. A retarding mechanism may be provided to retard motion of the disc **134a**. Any suitable type of retarding mechanism may be provided. In the embodiment herein described, the retarding mechanism includes top and bottom pads **136a**, **136b** disposed proximate the top and bottom surfaces of the disc **134a**, respectively. At least one of the pads **136a**, **136b** may be compressible towards the disc **134a** such that the pads **136a**, **136b** pinch the disc **134a** to thereby retard its motion about the steering axis.

In the embodiment shown and herein described, a steer assembly **118** may be provided to control the steering of the wheels **102a**, **102b** about the steering axis. For each of the wheel assemblies **101a**, **101b** steer shafts **138a**, **138b** may extend along the steering axis from a bottom steer shaft end to a top steer shaft end. The bottom steer shaft end may be connected to the axle **104a**, and the top steer shaft end may be coupled to the steer assembly **118**, such that the steer assembly **118** controls rotation of the steer shaft **138a** about the steering axis, which in turn steers the wheel **102a** about the steering axis. The bottom steer shaft end may be mounted to the axle **104a** via a casting **152a** such that the axle **104a** rotates about the steering axis along with the steer shaft **138a**, thus causing the wheel **102a** to rotate about the steering axis. As described in further detail below, the wheel **102a** may be tilted with respect to the steering axis.

In one example, the steer assembly **118** may include a steer motor **144**, steer belt **146**, a steer motor pulley **150**, and steer shaft pulleys **148a**, **148b**, the operation of which may be similar to that of the drive assembly **106a**. The steer motor **144** and steer belt **146** may control the steer shafts of both wheel assemblies **101a**, **101b**, to thus steer the wheels **102a**, **102b** synchronously. The steer motor **144** may extend substantially vertically. The steer motor **144** and drive motors **122a**, **122b** may be disposed on opposite ends or sides of the chassis **120** from one another (e.g., on fore and aft ends, on left and right sides). In the embodiment shown in FIGS. 1-6, the drive motors **122a**, **122b** may be disposed on the fore end of the chassis **120** and the steer motor **144** on the aft end of the chassis **120**. The steer belt **146** and steer pulleys **150**, **148a**, **148b**, may rotate within a plane that is substantially parallel to and below the plane in which the drive motors **122a**, **122b**, drive belts **124a**, **124b**, and drive pulleys **126a**, **126b**, **128a**, **128b** rotate. The steer shaft pulley

148a that is arranged on the steer shaft **138a** may be disposed beneath the drive shaft pulley **128a** that is arranged on the drive shaft **108a**.

With reference to FIG. 6, in some embodiments, the steer shaft **138a** may be arranged concentrically with respect to the drive shaft **108a**. More particularly, the steer shaft **138a** and drive shaft **108a** may each extend along the steering axis, with the drive shaft **108a** being disposed within the steer shaft **138a**. As such, and as shown in FIGS. 5 and 6, the drive shaft **108a** may be connected to the axle **104a** via the bevel gear **114a**, and the steer shaft **138a** may be mounted to the axle **104a** via a casting **152a** that is disposed around the bevel gear **114a**.

As shown in FIG. 6, in some embodiments, the bevel gear **114a** may be configured so that the wheel **102a** is tilted with respect to the steering axis. This tilt may reduce scrubbing action when the wheel turns, and thus improve durability and steering capabilities. As shown in FIG. 6, a wheel axis may extend along the length of the wheel, perpendicular to the drive axis. In this example, the wheel axis does not extend parallel to the steering axis, but rather is tilted at an angle relative thereto. As such, while the drive shaft and steering axis extend in a substantially vertical direction, the axle and drive axis may extend in a direction that is not horizontal. In other words, the bevel gear **114a** may be configured such that the steering axis and drive axis form an angle that is oblique. In some examples, the wheel **102a** is tilted at an angle so that when the robotic platform **100** is on a surface, the wheel rotates about the steering axis at a point that is its center of mass. For example, for a wheel and tire configuration having a diameter substantially equal to 16 inches, the bevel gear may be configured so that the angle between the drive axis and steering axis is about 110 degrees and the angle between the steering axis and the wheel is equal to about 20 degrees.

As shown in FIGS. 1-6, the entire chassis **120** may be arranged above the wheels **102a**, **102b**, and the drive and steer shafts **108a**, **108b**, **138a**, **138b** may extend from the respective axle through the surface of chassis **120** to a location at or above a top surface of the chassis **120**. In addition, the drive and steer belts **124a**, **124b**, **146** and pulleys **126a**, **126b**, **128a**, **128b**, **150**, **148a**, **148b**, may be located at or above the top surface of the chassis **120**. Also, the drive and steer motors **122a**, **122b**, **144** may be located distally from the wheels **102a**, **102b**. Thus, with the chassis disposed between the wheel and the drive and steer belts and pulleys, and the drive and steer motors **122a**, **122b**, **144** located distally from the wheels **102a**, **102b**, the drive and steer assemblies may be protected from environmental conditions that may surround the wheel.

In some embodiments, drive belts **124a**, **124b** may be wrapped directly around the circumference of at least one of the drive motor **122a**, **122b** or drive shaft **108a** without a separate pulley component (e.g., the bottom portion of the drive motors **122a**, **122b** and/or top portion of the drive shafts **108a**, **108b** may function as a pulley).

The term "wheel," in some examples, generally refers to any suitable type of disc or other object that is rotatable about an axis. Examples of wheels include, without limitation, a disc-shaped object that is configured to roll along a surface, a propeller capable of converting rotational movement to thrust (e.g., to drive a boat through the water), or any other type or form of rotatable object. The robotic platform described herein can have a multitude of applications. For example, the robotic platform may support a robot that is

configured to navigate through extreme environmental conditions, perform surgery in a hospital, manage a data center, etc.

While the robotic platform **100** is referred to herein as having a fore end with an idle caster wheel **158** and an aft end with driven wheel assemblies **101a**, **101b**, the disclosed robotic platform **100** may move in multiple directions such that the aft end, right side, and left side may also be located at the front of the robotic platform **100**. For example, the disclosed robotic platform may be capable of moving in all directions on a substantially horizontal surface. In one instance, the wheels **102a**, **102b** may both turn about the steering axis 90 degrees, such that the right side of the robotic platform **100** becomes the front of the vehicle as it moves horizontally across the surface. This may be particularly advantageous when navigating the robotic platform **100** between objects or barriers. For example, in order to “parallel park” the robotic platform **100** into a space between two objects, the platform does not need to maneuver to angle forward and backwards in the traditional process for parallel parking. Rather, the robotic platform **100** may be positioned beside and parallel to a space, turn the wheels **102a**, **102b** to be directed to the space (e.g., turn the wheels **102a**, **102b** 90 degrees), and then simply move linearly (e.g., in a sideways direction) into the space. Also, the robotic platform **100** may move in a backward direction without using a reverse gear. Thus, the robotic platform **100** may be capable of moving in the backward direction with the same speed as in the forward direction.

The robotic platform **100** may be used in a variety of contexts and/or may be used to support a variety of different types of robots. For example, the robotic platform **100** may support an autonomous or semi-autonomous data center robot. In this example, the robotic platform **100** may enable the data center robot to move through aisles of a data center to install, remove, and/or service rack mount units and modules within the data center. Additionally or alternatively, multiple instances of robotic platform **100** may support a robotic gantry capable of moving among data center aisles and servicing modules within the aisles at various different heights.

As another example, the robotic platform **100** may support a telepresence robot. In this example, the robotic platform **100** may enable to telepresence robot to move from one location to another, to move to the optimal location for interacting with another robot or human, and/or to move in any other suitable manner.

A third example is provided in FIG. 7, which shows an accessibility robot **700** mounted on two instances of robotic platform **100**, shown as platforms **100a**, **100b**. In this example, a chair **704** may be coupled to platform **100a** at ball joint **190a** and platform **100b** at a ball joint not visible in FIG. 7. Accessibility robot **700** may also include arms **706a**, **706b** coupled to platforms **100a**, **100b**, respectively. A user **702** may control arms **706a**, **706b** via any suitable control interface (e.g., using voice control, using a joystick or control pad, etc.) to perform a variety of tasks. Similarly, the user **702** may use a control interface to direct platforms **100a**, **100b** to move accessibility robot **700** from one location to another.

While several distinct examples of using robotic platform **100** have been presented, robotic platform **100** may be utilized in any other suitable context and/or to support any other suitable type or form of robot.

Referring now to FIG. 8, also disclosed herein is a method **800** of assembling a differential drive robotic platform, such as the robotic platform **100** described above with reference

to FIGS. 1-6. In step **810**, a right drive motor and right drive belt may be arranged on a right side of a chassis, and a left drive motor and left drive belt may be arranged on a left side of the chassis. In steps **820** and **830**, left and right wheel assemblies may be assembled. In step **820**, for each left and right wheel assembly, a caster wheel may be mounted to a respective axle for rotation about a drive axis and steering about a substantially vertical steering axis. In step **830**, for each left and right wheel assembly, a first end of a drive shaft may be coupled to the axle with a bevel gear, such that each drive shaft extends along the steering axis from the first end to a second end. In step **840**, the left and right wheel assemblies may be mounted to left and right sides of the chassis, respectively. In step **850**, the left and right drive belts may be wrapped around the drive shaft of the left and right wheel assemblies, respectively, such that the drive belt controls rotation of the drive shaft about the steering axis. Each bevel gear may couple the respective drive shaft to the axle such that rotation of the drive shaft about the steering axis controls rotation of the wheel about the drive axis to move the robotic platform in a substantially horizontal direction. In step **860**, a controller may be electrically coupled to the left and right drive motors. The controller may be coupled to the left and right drive motors independently of one another, to provide differential power.

The disclosed robotic platform may provide many advantages. For example, the robotic platform’s power assembly may be located entirely outside the circumference of the wheel, thus protecting the power assembly from forceful impacts as well as environmental conditions that may surround the robotic platform. Similar benefits may be achieved by disposing a brake assembly distally from the wheel. The robotic platform disclosed herein may also allow the wheel to freely rotate 360 degrees about its steering axis without becoming entangled by electrical wires or other components of the drive assembly. The disclosed robotic platform may provide differential power, which may enable improved steering and maneuverability.

The methods and sequence of the steps described and/or illustrated herein are given by way of example only and can be varied as desired. For example, while the steps illustrated and/or described herein may be shown or discussed in a particular order, these steps do not necessarily need to be performed in the order illustrated or discussed. The various exemplary methods described and/or illustrated herein may also omit one or more of the steps described or illustrated herein or include additional steps in addition to those disclosed.

The preceding description has been provided to enable others skilled in the art to best utilize various aspects of the exemplary embodiments disclosed herein. This exemplary description is not intended to be exhaustive or to be limited to any precise form disclosed. Many modifications and variations are possible without departing from the spirit and scope of the instant disclosure. The embodiments disclosed herein should be considered in all respects illustrative and not restrictive. Reference should be made to the appended claims and their equivalents in determining the scope of the instant disclosure.

Unless otherwise noted, the terms “connected to” and “coupled to” (and their derivatives), as used in the specification and claims, are to be construed as permitting both direct and indirect (i.e., via other elements or components) connection. In addition, the terms “a” or “an,” as used in the specification and claims, are to be construed as meaning “at least one of.” Finally, for ease of use, the terms “including” and “having” (and their derivatives), as used in the speci-

11

cation and claims, are interchangeable with and have the same meaning as the word "comprising."

What is claimed is:

1. A robotic platform, comprising:

a chassis having oppositely disposed top and bottom 5
sides, left and right sides, and a fore end and an aft end;
left and right driven wheel assemblies disposed proximate
left and right sides of the chassis, each of the left and
right driven wheel assemblies comprising:
a caster wheel mounted to an axle for rotation about a 10
drive axis and steering about a substantially vertical
steering axis, the caster wheel being positioned at the
aft end of the chassis;
a drive shaft extending along the steering axis from a
first drive shaft end to a second drive shaft end; 15
a drive motor positioned at the fore end of the chassis
and coupled to the second drive shaft end via a drive
belt; and
a bevel gear connecting the first drive shaft end to the
axle such that rotation of the drive shaft about the 20
steering axis controls rotation of the caster wheel
about the drive axis to drive the robotic platform in
a substantially horizontal direction;
a controller for controlling the left and right drive motors
independently of one another; and 25
a steer assembly disposed on the chassis, the steer assem-
bly comprising a steer motor positioned at the aft end
of the chassis and a steer belt, wherein:
each of the left and right driven wheel assemblies 30
includes a steer shaft extending longitudinally along
the steering axis from a first steer shaft end to a
second steer shaft end; and
the first steer shaft end is coupled to the axle.

2. The robotic platform of claim 1, wherein the controller 35
is further configured to control the steer motor.

3. The robotic platform of claim 1, wherein the steer belt
is wrapped around both the second steer shaft end of the
steer shaft of the left driven wheel assembly and the second
steer shaft end of the steer shaft of the right driven wheel 40
assembly such that the caster wheel of the left driven wheel
assembly and the caster wheel of the right driven wheel
assembly rotate synchronously.

4. The robotic platform of claim 1 wherein, in each of the
left and right driven wheel assemblies, the drive shaft is 45
concentrically arranged inside of the steer shaft.

5. The robotic platform of claim 1, wherein at least one of
the left and right driven wheel assemblies comprises a brake
arranged on the second drive shaft end and dimensioned to
retard motion of the drive shaft to thereby retard motion of 50
the caster wheel.

6. The robotic platform of claim 5 wherein the brake
comprises a disc brake, the disc brake comprising:

a disc disposed on the drive shaft and configured to rotate
with the drive shaft about the steering axis; and 55
a pair of pads on top and bottom sides of the disc, wherein
the pads are compressible against the disc to retard
rotation of the disc and thereby retard rotation of the
drive shaft.

7. The robotic platform of claim 1, wherein the drive axis
and the steering axis together form an oblique angle such 60
that the caster wheel is tilted relative to the steering axis.

8. The robotic platform of claim 1, wherein the caster
wheel is configured to freely rotate 360 degrees about the
steering axis.

9. The robotic platform of claim 1, further comprising at 65
least one idle caster wheel disposed proximate the fore end
of the chassis.

12

10. The robotic platform of claim 1, wherein the second
drive shaft end and the drive motor are disposed on top of
the chassis.

11. A robot comprising:

a chassis having oppositely disposed top and bottom
sides, left and right sides, and a fore end and an aft end;
left and right driven wheel assemblies, each of the left and
right driven wheel assemblies comprising:

a caster wheel mounted to an axle for rotation about a
drive axis and steering about a steering axis, the
caster wheel being positioned at the aft end of the
chassis;

a drive shaft extending along the steering axis from a
first drive shaft end to a second drive shaft end;

a motor positioned at the fore end of the chassis and
coupled to the second drive shaft end via a drive belt;
and

a bevel gear coupling the first drive shaft end to the axle
such that rotation of the drive shaft about the steering
axis controls rotation of the caster wheel about the
drive axis to drive the robot in a substantially hori-
zontal direction;

a controller configured to control the left and right drive
motors independently of one another; and

a steer assembly disposed on the chassis, the steer assem-
bly comprising a steer motor positioned at the aft end
of the chassis and a steer belt, wherein:

each of the left and right driven wheel assemblies includes
a steer shaft extending longitudinally along the steering
axis from a first steer shaft end to a second steer shaft
end; and

the first steer shaft end is coupled to the axle.

12. The robot of claim 11, wherein:

the controller is further configured to control the steer
motor to steer the robot.

13. The robot of claim 12, wherein the steer belt is
wrapped around the steer shafts of the left and right driven
wheel assemblies such that the steer shafts rotate synchro-
nously.

14. The robot of claim 12, wherein for each of the left and
right driven wheel assemblies, the drive shaft is concentri-
cally arranged inside of the steer shaft.

15. The robot of claim 11, wherein for each of the left and
right driven wheel assemblies, a brake is arranged on the
second drive shaft end and configured to retard motion of the
drive shaft to thereby retard motion of the caster wheel.

16. The robot of claim 15, wherein the brake comprises a
disc brake having:

a disc arranged on its respective drive shaft and config-
ured to rotate with the drive shaft about the steering
axis, and

a pair of pads on top and bottom sides of the disc, wherein
the pads are compressible against the disc to retard
rotation of the disc and thereby retard rotation of its
respective drive shaft.

17. The robot of claim 11, wherein for each drive wheel
assembly, the bevel gear is configured such that the caster
wheel is tilted relative to the steering axis so that the caster
wheel is steerable about the steering axis at a single point of
rotation.

18. The robot of claim 11, wherein for each driven wheel
assembly, the caster wheel is configured to freely rotate
freely 360 degrees about the steering axis.

19. A method of assembling a robotic platform, compris-
ing:

arranging a drive assembly on a chassis, the drive assem-
bly comprising:

13

a left drive motor and a left drive belt that is controlled
by the left drive motor, and
a right drive motor and a right drive belt that is
controlled by the right drive motor;
assembling left and right driven wheel assemblies, 5
wherein assembling the driven wheel assemblies comprises:
mounting a caster wheel to an axle for rotation about a
drive axis and steering about a substantially vertical 10
steering axis; and
coupling a first end of a drive shaft to the axle with a
bevel gear, wherein the drive shaft extends along the
steering axis from the first end of the drive shaft to
a second end of the drive shaft;
15
mounting the left driven wheel assembly to a left side of
the chassis such that the left drive motor is positioned
at a fore end of the chassis and the caster wheel of the
left driven wheel assembly is positioned at an aft end of
the chassis;
20
mounting the right driven wheel assembly to a right side
of the chassis such that the right drive motor is positioned
at the fore end of the chassis and the caster wheel
of the right driven wheel assembly is positioned at the
aft end of the chassis;
25
wrapping the left drive belt around the drive shaft of the
left driven wheel assembly such that the left drive belt
controls rotation of the drive shaft about its steering
axis;

14

wrapping the right drive belt around the drive shaft of the
right driven wheel assembly, such that the right drive
belt controls rotation of the drive shaft about its steering
axis;
electrically coupling a controller to the left and right drive
motors to control the left and right drive motors independently
from one another and provide differential power; and
arranging a steering assembly at an aft end of the chassis,
the steering assembly comprising a steer motor and a
steer belt that is controlled by the steer motor;
wherein for each of the left and right driven wheel
assemblies, the bevel gear couples its respective first
drive shaft end to the axle, such that rotation of the
drive shaft about the steering axis controls rotation of
the caster wheel about the drive axis to drive the robotic
platform in a substantially horizontal direction.
20. The method of claim 19, wherein:
assembling each of the left and right driven wheel assemblies
further comprises coupling a first end of a steer shaft
to the axle, each steer shaft extending along the steering
axis from the first end of the steer shaft to a second end
of the steer shaft; and
arranging the steering assembly further comprises wrapping
the steer belt around each steer shaft such that the steer
assembly controls rotation of each steer shaft about its
respective steering axis, which thereby steers the caster
wheel about the steering axis.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 10,678,242 B2
APPLICATION NO. : 15/828423
DATED : June 9, 2020
INVENTOR(S) : Scott C. Wiley

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

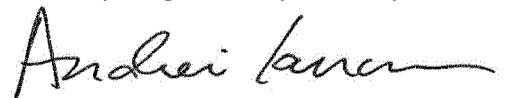
In the Claims

In Column 12, Line 13, Claim 11, delete "xis" and insert -- axis --, therefore.

In Column 12, Lines 62-63, Claim 18, delete "rotate freely" and insert -- rotate --, therefore.

In Column 14, Line 2, Claim 19, delete "assembly," and insert -- assembly --, therefore.

Signed and Sealed this
Twenty-eighth Day of July, 2020



Andrei Iancu
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office